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## Police training

Standard reporter gets  
hands on experience  
Page 3

## Student wins gold

Port High student advances to nationals  
Page 17

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## Booze smuggling past



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Museum  
curator  
Stephanie  
Powell  
Baswick  
looks at  
some of  
the items  
that are  
on display  
at the  
museum  
this  
summer.  
See story  
on Page 2.

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# UPFRONT

## Prohibition-era Port Colborne showcased

**ALLAN BENNER**  
Postmedia Network

There are a lot of rumours and speculation about the role Port Colborne played in the 1920s when Prohibition was in effect south of the border.

There's a legend about a large waterfront home, possibly the Rathion Inn, where Canadian booze — including some that was brewed locally — was loaded onto boats in the middle of the night and transported across Lake Erie and into the United States, says Port Colborne Historical and Marine Museum curator Stephanie Powell Baswick.

"There was talk," she says. "There are oral histories, people talking about a tunnel that led right up to a store."

She says another legend is about a tunnel under West Street, used to load boats with barrels of booze.

The museum has added a travelling exhibit to its displays this year, put together by the Peterborough museum about the Prohibition era.

It's called The Noble Experiment: Temperance and Prohibition.

"It really complements our local story," Powell Baswick says.

Although legends such as the tunnels are not presented as fact, they are still part of Port Colborne's lore.

"We look for clues and if



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Port Colborne Historical and Marine Museum curator Stephanie Powell Baswick looks at some of the items that are on display at the museum this summer.

we don't find any we don't report on that," she says.

But stories about the local connection to rum-running can't be ignored, either.

"We're careful not to really get into anything we can't document," she says.

"But we do tell a little bit about what has been told, what's the lore."

The Prohibition feature is one of two exhibits on display at the Port Colborne museum this year.

The exhibit Call to Action!

Port Colborne Under Threat commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Fenian raids of 1866.

At Welland's museum, the featured exhibit this year focuses on military history as well, with a dis-

play called Niagara and the Great Wars.

The exhibit, made possible with federal government funding, primarily explores the First World War and the impact it had on the community, through displays of

### PORT COLBORNE MUSEUM EVENTS

**May 29:** Arabella's Pie Social and History Fair, from noon to 4 p.m.

**July 30-31:** Canal Days

**July to December:** Pulling into Port — celebrating the 50th anniversary of Port Colborne becoming a city

**Sept. 2:** 50s Shindig, tickets are \$10 each

**Sept. 8-10 and Oct. 20-22:** cemetery tours

**November to December:** Christmas in the Making exhibit

**Dec. 4:** 40th annual Grand Old Christmas

personal items provided by a private collector of military artifacts. It also includes a series of discussions about military history, featuring guest speakers.

St. Catharines Museum curator Kathleen Powell is the next speaker in the series. She will discuss canal workers and veterans, from June 4 from 2 to 4 p.m. Tickets are \$10 each, and people who would like to attend can register by calling the museum at 905-732-2215.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Crash course in police training

I had less than a second to make a life or death decision, and I flunked the test.

I shot the guy pointing a cellphone at me.

Last Monday morning, I had the experience of standing on a police shooting range and pointing a gun at a spinning target. I had to make a split-second decision that, in real life, would irrevocably change the life of everybody involved.

My trainer looked at the target — and looked at me — and dryly said, "That's a lawsuit."

Niagara Regional Police offered members of the media use of force training and simulations as part of their Police Week activities.

Police use of force is a controversial topic that stirs emotions, which are magnified when things turn out badly.

I know. I've sat through trials of officers facing criminal charges. I've spent hours at the Niagara Regional Police internal disciplinary tribunals.

But every day there are examples across Niagara where the intensive training pays off. Nobody gets hurt. The suspects go to jail or get the help they need. The officers return home safely to their families.

The NIRO has started to give the public a better understanding of how quickly things happen on the street, and how overwhelming and intense the situations are for officers.

They also wanted to educate the public on the use-of-force options officers have at their disposal, and why they



St. Catharines Standard reporter Bill Sawchuk learns to use a gun on the firing range at the Niagara Regional Police training facility at the Welland campus of Niagara College.

use them.

"The Ontario Use of Force Model is our guide, and every officer uses it to determine their options," Sgt. Paul Thomas said. "The option an officer chooses is based on the behaviour of the subject,

but those choices vary.

"We have 669 models on the road, and each one of them might deal with a situation in a different way based on their knowledge, skills and personality. There is also a difference between what we are allowed

to do, and what we should do. 'Of course, we don't have the option of leaving either. We are the police.'

For instance, if a grandmother tries to whack you with a cane, she has crossed the line and, based on the

use of force guidelines, has become assaultive. You can't shoot her, but an officer would be justified in giving her a shot of pepper spray in the eyes.

Is it a good idea? Probably not, Thomas said. It would be better to back off a little bit

and regroup — communicate and de-escalate.

Reporters faced another judgment scenario for which after an innocuous conversation, a drug addict charged wildly out of a washroom armed with a syringe. Stephannie Sabourin of 610 CKTB News shot him in the groin.

I'm no expert, but it seemed an appropriate response.

"The big belief is in tactical communication — talking to the person and finding out about the situation — and using the least force necessary," Thomas said. "In some cases, it is out of our control. Sometimes people won't comply and become assaultive or threaten grievous bodily harm or death — and that's where the officer has to make a decision."

There is a dizzying array of choice guns, lasers, distractants and tools that can use knees and elbows as weapons. They can use pepper spray.

And they better make the right choice. Their superiors, the province's Special Investigations Unit, the Crown and defence attorneys will analyze their response in microscopic detail.

In the end, I survived my crash course on police training, and I had two male takeaways.

First, I have a deeper appreciation for the men and women in blue.

Second, I have no desire to trade my notepad and laptop computer for a badge and Kevlar vest. I'm a writer, not a fighter.

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# I've been thinking about identity

**FATHER DAVID GRAHAM SCOTT**  
 St Ignatius of Antioch Orthodox Church

I attended a preview performance of "Alice in Wonderland" at the Shaw Festival. There was a lot of fun. It was a lavish and lively production.

By eating certain foods or drinking potions Alice found herself growing smaller, then larger, then smaller again. She soon asked the question, "Who in the world am I?"

This is one of the big questions for most human beings. Some would say humans are animals and a few would say we are parasites.

When a friend of mine was examined by a United Church ordination committee and asked the question who she was, she replied, "I am a child of God."

George Dryden had long thought he was the son of prominent federal Liberal Gordon

Dryden. Five years ago a friend told him there was a quiet family rumour that his mother Mary Lou had an affair with John Diefenbaker and that he was the result.

His mother admitted that his real father's name was John. George had a resemblance to the former prime minister. A DNA test with a relative gave some evidence he might well be Diefenbaker's son.

Who, then, was George Dryden? A friend described him as sensitive, caring and wonderful friend, but that "He truly didn't know who he was." George eventually contracted pancreatic cancer and recently died of fatal pain in a suicide.

Englishman Justin Welby was born to two alcoholic parents, who divorced when he was three years old. He spent most of his childhood in boarding schools, including Eton. He became a successful businessman in the oil industry. At the age of 33 he left the hust-

ness and studied for the Anglican priesthood. Three years ago he was named Archbishop of Canterbury.

Until recently Archbishop Welby believed his father was Gavin Welby, who died in 1977. But some people noticed Welby's strong resemblance to Sir Anthony Montague Brown, who was private secretary to Sir Winston Churchill.

Welby's mother had worked alongside Brown until her elopement with Gavin Welby in 1955.

To put the matter at rest, Archbishop Welby agreed to DNA testing with his son. His mother was shocked to find that Sir Anthony Montague Brown was Justin Welby's father.

Archbishop Welby's response was simple. He said, "My identity is founded in who I am in Christ."

Eric Metaxas noted we live in a culture obsessed with identity. "Whether that identity

is racial, ethnic, political, sexual or lifestyle choice, they are all an attempt to answer the question Who am I."

But for the Christian, Welby's answer is universal: "My identity is founded in who I am in Christ."

St Paul told the Colossians that our life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3).

He told the Corinthians, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17).

To the Romans he said, "We were buried with Him through baptism into death, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).

So, Christians know who we are and we know the purpose of life: to walk in newness of life, loving God and neighbour, showing forgiveness and mercy, doing good works. In short, the purpose of human life is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

## A better approach to homelessness

**N**iagara Region has an opportunity to do some real good if it has the discipline and courage to put the community before the interests of individual councillors.

In next few weeks, a full report on the homeless count in Niagara will be tabled at the Region. Although likely to contain several caveats related to the difficulty in collecting definitive data — it's more complicated than issuing a simple census — it will provide the clearest picture to date about where our poorest citizens can be found and how many are there.

That data ought to be a powerful guide for how Niagara Region chooses to allocate resources to build subsidized housing units.

To do so, however, councillors must put aside the personal agendas and think beyond their town or city limits.

I sat down last week with St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik, for whom improving how the Garden City assists those in need is a major preoccupation, and asked him about social housing.

He's made the "compassionate city" a key plank of his administration. The idea is to transform the corporate culture at city hall so that all members of staff — from parks and recreation personnel to the mayor himself — are trained and ready to assist those in the community who need it.



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If the city treats citizens with more compassion and understanding, he believes, the entity will flourish.

For a region, Sendzik is an advocate for a related concept called "housing first," adopted by communities across North America, including Niagara, to one degree or another.

Essentially, the idea is that if a community can provide stable shelter for the homeless, it becomes much easier to grapple with the reasons those people were homeless in the first place, he it unemployment, addictions or mental health issues.

However, as much as Sendzik wants city hall to be the driving force of a compassionate city, Niagara's political structure places hard limits on what it can do when it comes to housing.

Sendzik, a member of the regional housing board, said social housing is a regional responsibility. The Region, as the upper tier government, is mandated to handle the file.

A city like St. Catharines can assist by, for example, waiving development fees for a housing project, but it ultimately isn't building affordable housing units, let alone creating its own housing first project.

So that leaves Sendzik to negotiate at the regional level.

"We need to be guided by the data," Sendzik said. "If the data showed that St. Catharines didn't need that housing, I wouldn't push for it. I don't expect that is what the data will show."

It is that kind of data-driven, Niagara-first approach that will make a real difference.

But it's not something the region often excels at. Councillors will fight to get money directed to their constituency, even if from a Niagara perspective those resources are better spent elsewhere.

St. Catharines and Niagara Falls are likely to be the places most in need of housing, but that may not stop some politicians from asking why those resources aren't going to their communities, even if the need isn't there.

Fortunately, even in the house of dysfunction that is regional council, there are positive precedents to follow.

Acting against its own nature, council, along with Niagara's mayors, managed to march in step to make a strong pitch to Queen's Park for GO trains.

(Don't buy into the hype that GO trains are definitely 100 per cent coming to Niagara, however. There is a long way to go yet and provincial government has offered nothing but a tepid consideration of the idea.)

The pitch worked for two reasons. First, it was driven using the best, most robust data available. Second, it presented Niagara as a whole, rather than a squabbling bunch of fiefdoms.

It is, when you get down to it, the way to deal with issues that cross municipal boundaries in Niagara, which is hampered by its two-tier governance model.

Affordable housing and homelessness have been handled the same way the GO file was. Sendzik shouldn't have to compete with his colleagues for a piece of the regional pie for St. Catharines. Rather, the issue ought to be properly regarded as regional in nature, and resources allocated where the need exists.

Until the Region can act in this manner routinely, even the most well meaning or thoughtful municipal politicians will find themselves faced by unnecessary obstacles.

For the complete interview with St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik on the compassionate city project, homelessness and housing, tune into the Like to Like podcast this afternoon at [www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/nigrapodcasts](http://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/nigrapodcasts).

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# LOCAL NEWS

# Niagara housing market still sizzling

**DON FRASER**  
Postmedia Network

Brad Johnstone is on the front lines of a hot Niagara real estate market.

And that relentless demand for homes in the region continues to drive up prices.

So much so, Johnstone reports 15 per cent of transactions last month brought in more than the asking price.

"There was one in Niagara Falls with a list price of \$200,000 and it actually sold for \$260,000 cash," he said, with some amazement.

Johnstone said the pace is picking up since 2015 — the area's first year of double-digit price growth in 20 years.

"And already 2016 is out-pacing 2015," said Johnstone, broker of record with the Royal LePage Niagara Real Estate Centre. "We're feeling it right down to Port Colborne, Fort Erie. The market here is affected."

"It's all coming together to create this seller's market."

One couple from that Falls market can attest to the price spike. Adam and Angelone bought their house in the Stamford Village area four years ago for \$236,000.

In fact, they closed it in June, they're selling it for \$310,000 — \$21,000 more than their asking price.

"We did things right," Mel said. "We priced it right on target ... and we were hoping for a bidding war at the end."

"And we are one of the

lucky ones," she added, noting their new Falls home, not far away, was bought for nearly \$30,000 under its asking price from an initial listing they considered too high.

Recent data for the region is striking. It shows robust sales and price increases are relatively consistent throughout the region.

Niagara Association of Realtors reported the average residential sale price in April was \$303,805, or 8.8 per cent higher than April 2015.

Meanwhile, the Niagara Real Estate Centre, which also uses Multiple Listing Service system sales — crunched slightly different figures, excluding mobile homes for example.

It reported average sale prices in April at \$317,322 compared to the year-to-date average of \$309,114. The centre reported residential single-family homes prices including condos, in Niagara and Dunnville, are up by 12.9 per cent year over year.

Year over year April sales are up 26 per cent in the region. The centre expects the trend to continue over the next few months.

The association said the average number of days houses are listed on the residential market also continues to decrease, and was at 41 days in April.

Johnstone pointed to a number of factors affecting these speedy, pricey sales.

*Continued on next page*



Broker Brad Johnstone with Royal LePage Niagara is shown outside a Thorold home that sold above its asking price.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Niagara housing market still sizzling

From previous page

Supply and demand tops the list — there has been a recent decrease in new listings of about 15 per cent "and around a 20 per cent increase in buyers."

Among the factors are "locals buying up ... realizing our market still has a lower average sale price compared to other areas."

Some of those purchases are for investment only, and it is happening at all levels of real estate. Sales are powering up for both new home and resales, Johnston said.

"I'd say every market is benefiting."

The third is "retirees ... more and more people are looking at Niagara as not their second or third choice, it's jumping up to No. 1."

Another trend is in people who've grown up in Niagara, left the area, and are returning with their young families back here, thanks to flexible work hours or schedules in their CITA jobs.

As for future trends in Niagara, other areas in the Greater Toronto Area have had hot real estate markets for many years now.

"And until those other markets cool down, I don't expect we'll see a decrease," Johnston said.

Patrick Dunnitt, president of the Niagara Association of Realtors, echoed Johnston's key observation.

"The most influential thing I see with this is supply and demand," said the real estate industry veteran. "We're getting multiple offers on just about anything."

### SKYWARD RESIDENTIAL PRICES AND SALES IN NIAGARA

Residential average for 2015: sales \$7,286, average price \$272,724

For 2014, sales 6,241; average sale price \$251,446

For 2013 sales 5,798; average sale price \$238,742

Source: Niagara Association of Realtors

The robustness "seems to be right across the board (in Niagara)," he added.

As for the future "all of the indicators are there, with all the perceived developments that are going to go on," he said, including developments likely at the former GM plant on Ontario Street in St. Catharines and near Marineland in Niagara Falls.

Dunnitt said GO train expansion and potential for regional air transport at Niagara District Airport also bode well for area real estate numbers.

Affordability also remains a key to this robust market, Dunnitt said.

"The average price in Niagara region is \$303,805, and that gets you one heck of a house."

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# ODSP to swap cheques for cards

MARYANN FIRTH  
Postmedia Network

Local agencies were ready to deposit input last week on a new provincial initiative that will see reloadable cards provided to disability support recipients.

The Ministry of Social Development and Social Services announced clients of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) who do not have a bank account will receive their benefits on a payment card rather than receiving a paper cheque.

While the move may sound logical in theory, Betty-Lou Souter has her concerns.

The Community Care chief executive officer worries for the more than 300 clients enrolled in the St. Catharines agency's trusteeship program and what that change will mean to their finances.

The organization manages the money of trustee clients, paying their rent directly and budgeting their money to ensure bills are paid and needs are met throughout the month.

"It's one of the more successful programs in keeping people housed," Souter said, adding she fears the negative impact the card system might have.

By giving ODSP recipients cards, they're given direct access to their money. It then becomes a question of whether they'll be able to budget accordingly on their own, she said, calling it a "bit of an anxious moment."

"There has been no indication how the provincially-funded trusteeship program

will be affected as a result of the change.

The cards, which are not monitored by the government and do not identify the user as a social assistance recipient, are expected to be phased in this summer across Ontario.

A pilot project is underway with clients volunteering to test the option and provide feedback on useful supports. Souter said the pilot has been successful in some communities, but has run into barriers in others, particularly where access to banks is limited.

She worries about lost and stolen cards and what the replacement timelines will look like for people relying on that financial lifeline.

Souter acknowledged that some people will benefit from the change and some people will unfortunately fall between the cracks.

Ongoing dialogue needs to take place between the province and the agencies working on the ground level to make sure no clients are left behind, she said.

"Until it's implemented, I don't know how we're going to be able to see how many people are impacted."

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network chairman Glen Walker believes the cards could be a benefit to ODSP recipients.

"It's certainly worth us looking into in this day and age, to add to a much more effective way of dealing with our resources," he said.

*Continued on next page*

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## ODSP to swap cheques for cards

### From previous page

He's hopeful it will address struggles people have had with cheques being mailed out, while also deterring people from using payday loan services — a trend he says has become an issue locally.

The cards, provided by Royal Bank, will allow recipients to quickly access resources without having to walk around with an entire month's assistance in their pocket or stashed elsewhere, Walker said.

"I'd hope what we'd be able to do from an organizational standpoint is talk to and help support people around effective budgeting," he said, adding the cards may be the tool to promote that financial responsibility.

The network will be looking at the issue in more detail, discussing strategies for offering support to individuals as the program rolls out, he said.

"I really would like to see the province trying to move forward with some reforms," Walker said, adding it's a long time coming.

While provincially there may be some people the cards will work for, Community Care housing program manager Catherine Livingston believes that will not include the agency's vulnerable clients.

"From the cognitive ability of some of the people we serve or just from behaviours and habits, they won't be able to manage," she said. "There's a level of potential where they're able to."

Livingston also took issue with the limited four free ATM transactions allotted for the cards each month.

"That's not going to cut it," she said. The cards will also allow for unlimited in-store and online payments and

purchases.

Rather than offering cards to people who cannot open or maintain a bank account, she recommended putting supports in place to allow them to get a bank account up and running.

Livington is hopeful the government will carefully analyze the pilot project before implementing it across the province.

"I think it's going to cause some possible scenarios of people being homeless or not paying their utility bills," she said.

"They will be using more services. They will be accessing more housing stability benefits, more food banks, more transportation dollars. We don't want to be negative about this, but it's who we serve. It's what we see."

Project SHARE executive director Diane Corlett said she expects the impact this new process will have on ODSP recipients, particularly those facing mental health challenges.

Just remembering the steps along the way — including placement of the card and their pin number — could pose an issue, she said.

"Once again the most vulnerable are expected to step up and be efficient when perhaps it may not be possible all the time," she said.

Corkum has heard about isolation and a lack of human connection from clients, some of whom get their only interaction while visiting the bank.

She feels the introduction of the cards will only increase that separation.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Big Bike Ride has big place in her heart

**MICHELLE ALLENBERG**  
Postmedia Network

The annual Heart and Stroke Big Bike Ride has a special place in Donna

Abbott's heart.

About two years ago Abbott's brother-in-law Jack Roy died of a heart attack at age 66. Abbott

said his death was unexpected.

"It was a shock, but

really, heart and stroke, who isn't touched by it. It seems everybody you talk

to, someone has lost somebody," Abbott said sitting in the living room of her Port

Colborne home.

Continued on next page



MICHELLE ALLENBERG/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Donna Abbott discusses the Heart and Stroke Big Bike Ride taking place in Port Colborne.

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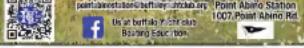
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# LOCAL NEWS

## Big Bike Ride has big place in her heart

### From previous page

Abbott said she found out after Roy's death he did have a heart condition, which he had kept secret.

Heart and Stroke Canada said that about 1.6 million Canadians live with heart disease or the effects of a stroke. About 80 percent of heart disease and stroke is preventable.

Last year Abbott participated in Port Colborne's Heart and Stroke ride in memory of Roy, who used to take part in the fundraiser.

"It was really an honour last year when Canalside (Restaurant) did the ride in honour, in memory of him. That was very touching," she said.

Abbott participated in the ride for the second year last Wednesday in memory of Roy.

The ride consisted of five teams who rode at different times.

Abbott said it is a lot of fun to watch and to be part of.

"What is great fun is that the bike seats said what the part is getting on it," she said with a laugh.

As for actually riding the bike, she said it is easy and anyone can do it. There are enough people pedalling that if anyone wants to take a break it doesn't impact movement.

Abbott laughed saying the ride isn't a race, so people can go at whatever speed they want.

She said some teams are quite large with about 30 people. There are even bikes which seat 30. But this year Abbott's team consists of 14 people.

Abbott's group has raised about \$1,500 for the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

For more information about heart disease and how to prevent heart and stroke go to [www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikfjQ1cMWjE/b.3483991/k.34A8/Statistics.htm](http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikfjQ1cMWjE/b.3483991/k.34A8/Statistics.htm).

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# Downtown Welland spiced up

After years of supplying newcomers to Canada with the things they missed most from back home, Naomi Cesar has opened her own Welland store.

Cesar originally from Haiti, recently celebrated the launch of CaribAfrica Specialty Store, on East Main Street.

"I've always been selling things I applied for the Summer Company Program in 2010 and I got a grant and I started a business that was Naomi's Beauty Supply," she said.

The program is run by the Ontario government to provide funding to students to start a summer business.

Cesar said when she first moved to the area she had a problem finding beauty products for her hair. This sparked her interest in creating a business to provide services for other people who couldn't find what they needed. Cesar started selling beauty products to newcomers.

"As I'm selling the beauty

they started asking me, 'Hey, Naomi can you find me corn meal? Can you find me okra? Can you find something?' So that's how it all started for food," Cesar said standing in the back room of her newly opened and bustling shop.

Cesar ending up being the go-to person for newcomers to find products from their home countries, which they missed. Slowly Cesar brought food and goods from Montreal to the area. After a while she decided it was time to open a store and make it her full-time work.

Cesar said there are only two stores she knows of in Niagara that sell African goods. She said one is in Niagara Falls and one is in St. Catharines. The stores predominantly sell African food, so Cesar felt there needed to be a store that also sells Caribbean food.

"There are a couple things which are similar, but there are still things we cannot find in there ... We are going to



MICHELLE ALLENBERG/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Naomie Cesar has recently opened CaribAfrica Specialty Shop in downtown Welland.

have more Caribbean, but we will add some African items, too," Cesar said smiling.

Eventually she would like to expand the store to include

a restaurant. She plans to have a kitchen where people can order takeout. Cesar said there aren't many Caribbean and African restaurants in the

region — and she said even Canadians love the food.

"I think it is a great thing that we are bringing our own culture. Not only for you guys

to taste it, but also for us to feel like we are home ... people are going to be happier and wanting to stay because they are here and feel their community," she said.

"You know what, I'm here to stay and this is my community. I want to stay here and grow."

As a single mother, Cesar said working and starting a business can be tough. But her advice to anyone interested in being an entrepreneur is to just "go for it." She said whatever a person's passion is they should pursue it.

"My daughter, she is eight years old, and she likes to sit at the back register. She says, 'Mommy, I'm going to be the cashier ... you know, Mommy, when I grow up I want to be like you.'

The store at 234 East Main St. is open Monday to Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. On Sundays the store will be open 3 to 6 p.m.

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# Growing cry for OMB change

**ALLAN BENNER**  
Postmedia Network

Municipal councillors often feel they have no say on planning issues, despite the wishes of the people they represent.

But a growing "grass-roots" movement of municipalities across Ontario is working to change the perception, said Welland Ward 1 Coun. May Ann Grimaldi.

Grimaldi is Niagara's sole representative on the OMB reform working group - a committee comprised of 17 municipal councillors from communities that is leading efforts to rein in the powers of the OMB.

The working group, led by Aurora Councillor Tom Mrakas, held a summit on OMB reform in Markham, last Saturday, giving more than 100 representatives of municipalities from across Ontario an opportunity

to discuss their concerns about the provincial organization designed to hear appeals regarding municipal decisions about developments.

Niagara Falls Councillor Joyce Morocco said she still hears concerns from constituents about a gas station that was built at the intersection of Montrose and Thorold Stone Road - despite the objection of Niagara Falls council.

"The residents didn't want it," she said. "We voted in support of our residents not wanting a gas station there near a school."

The developer appealed the decision at the OMB, council's decision was overruled and now "there's a gas station there."

Now, when Morocco talks with some of the neighbouring residents, "They say, 'I can't believe you passed that bloody gas station near my kid's school!'"

"No we didn't," Morocco

said. "We turned it down. It was overruled, and the OMB approved it."

Grimaldi said people from across the province shared similar concerns during the summit.

"There are certain things that you find in all the different municipalities that we've heard from," she said. "Most of the comments and most of the changes that they would like to see are similar in all the communities."

Several Niagara municipal politicians attended the summit, including:

In addition to Grimaldi and Morocco, Niagara-on-the-Lake Councillors Jim Collard and Betty Disero also attended the summit.

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In the meantime, Grimaldi said support for change is strong.

So far, 80 municipalities have supported a motion that was originally drafted by Mrakas in December. The motion calls on the provincial government to limit the jurisdiction of the OMB to "questions of law or process," and the OMB be required to uphold the decisions of municipal councils unless they are contrary to the processes and rules set out in legislation.

However, she said McKeevin has asked the working group for a report from the summit to be considered as part of a review on reforming the OMB the province is conducting.

"We're not done. This is just the beginning," Grimaldi said.

She said the next step will be to put together a list of

a 17-storey condominium located in the backyards of a nice quiet neighbourhood, we don't have much choice," said Mayor Paul Campion. "Based on provincial legislation as far as inflilling and densities and that sort of thing, you're going to lose."

Campion said they feel as though their "hands are tied" regarding controversial planning decisions, because their decisions are often overturned by the Ontario Municipal Board.

"You can't stand if you say no, you're going to end up at the OMB and it's going to be costing you money."

Grimaldi said the efforts for OMB reform as "total grassroots."

People from across Ontario can have their say too, by signing a petition on the www.gopetition.com website.

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Justin Nisbett, a student at Port Colborne High School, demonstrates his welding skills that earned him a spot in the Skills Canada National Competition.

## Port High student wins gold in skills competition

Laura Barton  
Postmedia Network

A Port Colborne High School student has earned himself a spot at next month's Skills Canada National Competition.

Justin Nisbett has won gold in each of the three tiers so far for the skills competition. His most recent win at the Ontario Technological Skills Challenges held in Waterloo is sending him to nationals.

"We have to read the blueprint, put it together and put the welds in the right spots, how they want them in six hours," he said of the process of the competition.

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He described the experience as really stressful, but also said he enjoys being able to take raw materials and turning them into something.

Port High manufacturing teacher Vicki Barker said Nisbett is ready for nationals, which take place in Moncton, N.B.

Barker said Nisbett works on his skills seven days a week and has clocked close to 1,000 hours in practice both in and

### MEDAL WINNERS

**Gold:** Dalton Bird, Fort Erie, job skill demonstration; Jordan Haywood, Fort Erie, photography; Justin Nisbett, Port Erie, welding; Katrina Waters, Fort Erie, baking.

**Silver:** Michael Shannon, St. Catharines, hairstyling; Robert Klonowski and Cameron Lacelle, Port High, global information systems.

**Bronze:** Joey Alcroft, Westdale, refrigeration; Stephen Koenig and Jacob Naumann, Centennial, team carpentry

outside of school.  
Kevin Graham, team leader for Technological and Outdoor Education with the District School Board of Niagara, said in a news release there were a record number of medals earned at the provincial level this year.

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# Ready to ride for dad

BILL SAWCHUK  
Postmedia Network

Supporters of the Niagara chapter of the Motorcycle Ride for Dad have their motors running and are ready to head out on the highway.

The ride, which takes place Saturday, June 18, held its kickoff barbecue Tuesday in the courtyard beside the Niagara Regional Police headquarters on James Street in St. Catharines.

The ride raises awareness public of prostate cancer and funds for researching the disease.

During the ride's launch last week, NRP Deputy Chief Joe Matthews talked about his personal journey with cancer.

"The Ride for Dad has done a tremendous job of raising awareness. I suffered from both testicular cancer and colon cancer about 16 years ago.

"I'm fortunate because I survived it with excellent medical care. But I'm also fortunate because it taught me to raise awareness of symptoms and the importance of getting checked."

"After you have been through testicular and colon cancer, there is no embarrassment anymore. Get checked, gentlemen. A simple PSA check and a rectal exam can save your life."

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On the day of the ride, Niagara Regional Police motorcycle officers will escort the bikers. The ride begins at the Royal Canadian Legion hall in Niagara-on-the-Lake and continues down the Niagara River Parkway to Kingsbridge Park. From there it moves through Niagara before finishing at Club Italia in



BILL SAWCHUK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Damian Parrent, a Niagara chapter organizer of the Motorcycle Ride for Dad, helps kick off this year's ride, which is scheduled for June 18.

Niagara Falls.

All proceeds from Thursday's barbecue went to the Ride for Dad. The organization has a website at [http://support.pcfc.ca/site/TR?fr\\_id=1483&amp;pg=pg](http://support.pcfc.ca/site/TR?fr_id=1483&amp;pg=pg) for donations. The ride is the longest in the world; it uses dual eye tracking for accuracy and consistency.

[bsawchuk@postmedia.com](mailto:bsawchuk@postmedia.com)

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# Woman's disappearance treated as a homicide

**JUSTIN DALLAIRE**  
National Post

The father of a missing Ontario woman said his daughter's disappearance from a town in British Columbia is now being treated as a homicide investigation.

Ashley Simpson, a 32-year-old woman from St. Catharines, Ontario, has been missing from Salmon Arm, B.C., where she was working for the winter season, since April 28.

In recent weeks, her family and friends, including her father John Simpson, have travelled from Ontario to B.C. and back in search of her, while spreading the news of her disappearance on social media.

But with still no word on the whereabouts of his daughter, Simpson said the RCMP has changed her status from a missing person to a victim of homicide.

"I don't know what really convinced them to go from missing to homicide, other than there's a lot of things pointing in that direction," he said.

Cpl. Janelle Shoibet from the RCMP said in an email that the case is ongoing as investigators continue "looking for any information which may assist

in locating her." Shoibet said she was unaware of the change in the status of the case, adding that the police force would be unable to comment on an active homicide investigation.

"We don't comment on the specifics of an investigation until such time that charges are approved in court," she said earlier.

Nevertheless, Simpson said he and others were asked last Monday to provide police with statements and DNA swabs, which suggests a homicide investigation. He added that investigators have been searching a property on Yankee Flats Road in Salmon Arm, where Ashley was last seen.

"They know more than they're willing to tell us at the moment," Simpson said.

Among friends and family, Ashley is known as a "selfie queen," someone who is always posting on Facebook and keeping in touch with loved ones. For example, communicating with her family was "very out of character," according to her father.

Ashley's father, one of her sisters and her best friend arrived in Salmon Arm with posters and flyers to hand out on May 4, nearly a week after her boyfriend in B.C. reported her missing.

See MISSING | Page 23

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# 'She's going to be extremely missed there'

**MISSING from page 21**

Her cousin and a close family friend had arrived a few days earlier. Police had advised the family to wait before making their way there, believing Ashley could be hitchhiking home.

Ashley had expected to be in Ontario two Sunday afternoons ago because of a shower. She planned to start work in Huntsville on the long weekend.

Simpson said that when he and the others arrived in Salmon Arm, they were not allowed onto the 20-acre property where Ashley had been staying with her boyfriend. He said the RCMP had searched the grounds with police dogs and search and rescue volunteers, but were waiting on a search warrant before entering any of the buildings on the property.

Still, the group was able to assist in the investigation.

"We brought up a few things with the RCMP that we received from Ashley in texts," as well as messages from a Facebook group and from close family friends, at which point the police "seemed to change their direction a little bit," Simpson said.

With the help of his daughter, Simpson has been running a lodge in

Huntsville for the past six years, a task that will be "extremely hard" for him this year without her there. Around 100 people from the U.S. are expected to visit the lodge this summer.

"She's going to be extremely missed there," he said. "It's going to be hard, knowing all the circumstances that I know now."

"These kids [from the lodge] are like family to us," he added. "They'll be devastated, along with my grandchildren right now, who we can't tell... She's just such a lovely person."

Simpson has worked side-by-side with his daughter for years. "I've had her on ships. I've had her in diamond mines. I put her in camps, we do the lodge... She's followed me her whole life in my career."

At 62, Simpson is thinking about retirement. He said he can't imagine the future without Ashley.

"Probably going to give up everything I've got if I retire," he said, "because I just can't think of working without my daughter."

One of Ashley's cousins has started a Go Fund Me account to help pay for the family's travels and time off work. So far, it has raised more than \$3,500.

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# Standard's Sawchuk receives police media award

**ANDREA TINGEY**  
Special to Postmedia Network

St. Catharines journalist Bill Sawchuk has earned recognition for his reporting related to Niagara Regional Police.

The media award was presented by Chief Jeff McGuire at the annual police awards banquet two weeks ago. It is Sawchuk's first NRP award for his work.

"It was important to me because of who was giving the award," said Sawchuk, who attended the event with his wife Crystal Ramsay. "That respect and appreciation I have for the police, I don't always get a chance to express it because of the nature of what I do."

Sawchuk said he believes his award has something to do with his involvement in "Wanted Wednesdays," for which he spreads awareness of Niagara's most wanted fugitives through his journalism.

"I was on board with that right from the get-go," he said.

"I was honoured and humbled that they would select me," said Sawchuk, who has been covering police and justice for about three years and has a regular interview web show called Chat with the Chief.

Const. Phil Gavin said the media award is given to a reporter who is co-operative in their coverage of the police.

"That award is given to someone who works with us in a fair and balanced manner," he said.

Police also recognized former CHCH journalists Laura Sabourin and Dwight Penner for their work.

Other awards were given to police



Bill Sawchuk

officers, students and other community members.

Recipients included workers at the Rich Products plant in Fort Erie for their work on an ammonia leak there in July of last year.

Awards for officers included for retirement, years of service and for bravery and valour.

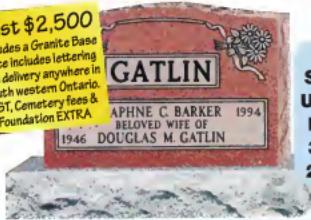
Sawchuk said he hasn't found a spot for the award yet, but he won't be placing it in his office.

"I will find a spot for it. Not on the mantle because the cat jumps up there and the cat likes to knock stuff off, so I have to find a spot."

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# Denied entry visas blamed for WRCC losses

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

Athletes denied access to Canada last summer

may have contributed to losses sustained by the Welland Recreational Canal Corp.

As councillors approved a plan to pay the \$92,210

deficit incurred by the WRCC last year, as well as a 2016 budget they hope will reduce losses from the deficit. With 2 Coun. David McLeod pointed out that the losses associated with last summer's World Dragon Boat Championships were likely the result of entry visas being denied for as many as 200 athletes from six countries, who had planned to compete at the Welland International Flawater Centre.

The city lost \$27,000 on that event which was forecast to earn \$275,000. The remaining losses were incurred on the WRCC's operating expenses.

After city treasurer Steve Zorbas confirmed that a substantial decrease in the number of athletes competing had a significant impact on budget projections, McLeod said a research story that was published in the *Tribune* on Aug. 19 about athletes being denied access to Canada.

"Councilor maybe you could just get to the point without reading the whole article," Mayor Frank Campion said.

McLeod said the article pointed out the number of athletes who denied access to Canada for the event was unprecedented and that a shortfall in participants contributed to the losses.

At this point, however, Campion said the city needs to decide how to fund the deficit, not debate how the losses occurred.

"Let's move on," he said.

"But the public wants to know how we missed," McLeod said.

Ward 4 Coun. Pat Chiocchio said he was disappointed to learn about the losses at the interim WRCC board meeting.

"It was frustrating because we've asked for numbers for a long time. But just last week we learned we had a loss of that amount," Chiocchio said.

"I want to make sure this doesn't happen again. I want to ensure that we are transparent in all of our numbers. We need to be more realistic with projections."

Ward 3 Coun. John Chiocchio described the WRCC finances as "like a bad cold – it never goes away."

He said the economic benefit to the community last year "was zero."

"We had the Pan Am Games – nothing happened," he said.

Ward 1 Coun. Mark Carl, however, pointed out that the city has benefited through the purchase of new dragon boats that will be used at the Welland International Flawater Centre for come.

"There's a \$27,000 loss, but there's an asset that has been purchased that will be used to save money or create revenue in the future," he said.

Carl said the financial losses were spent on creating local jobs and paying wages for events in the community.

Councillors also approved a \$705,413 budget for the WRCC this year, including \$379,500 from the city.

The city's grant includes \$332,000 in interest earned on the Welland Canal trust fund, as well as \$47,500 from the city's contingency budget to cover any additional expenses.

Zorbas said budgets that were developed by the organization's previous management "were aggressive."

But for future events, he said, budgets are being developed with "better principles."

Still, Zorbas said city staff cannot guarantee that event projections will be completely accurate, and the contingency fund included in the 2016 budget allows for any unforeseen losses.

McLeod remained concerned about the current budget, complaining that budgets developed by the previous WRCC board were presented based on the various aspects of the services it provides.

Instead, the 2016 budget includes all expenses and revenue in one document.

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